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ABSTRACT

This presentation by James S. Coleman examines several questions: Does desegregation bring about loss of whites from schools in a desegregated system? If so, what is the extent of that loss? And what are the conditions, in the demography and ecology of the system, as well as in the form of the desegregation policy, which affect the extent of that loss? A segregation index was constructed to aid in answering these questions. The change in the number of white students in a system during a school year was analyzed as a function of change in the segregation index. Other variables were also analyzed. The examination was carried out for all school systems during the period 1968-1973. Detailed examination was given to the 21 largest central city systems. Results show that desegregation brings about an extensive loss of whites, but this loss differs radically under different conditions. Data were analyzed for 1974 and 1975 for nine cities, among the largest 21, which in a single year at least partially desegregated. The results indicate that the desegregation loss did diminish after the first desegregation year, but it did not vanish. (Author/JM)

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Presentation on School Desegregation and White Flight

James S. Coleman

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My presentation this evening will be a summary of my research results on school desegregation and the loss of whites from desegregated schools. It will not discuss the other consequences of desegregation, such as achievement and interracial attitudes, nor the legal, ethical, and moral issues surrounding desegregation policy. Only at the end of the presentation will I have a word to say about policy implications of the research results. Here I want to examine the factual questions, which themselves have aroused some controversy: does desegregation bring about loss of whites from schools in a desegregated system? If so, what is the extent of that loss? And what are the conditions, in the demography and ecology of the system, as well as in the form of the desegregation policy, which affect the extent of that loss? The importance of these questions for social policy is evident, for if school desegregation policies are to aid, rather than harm, the racial integration of society, then the school integration they bring about must have some degree of stability, and must not exacerbate the residential separation of blacks and whites.

The principal research which I will report was carried out with Sara Kelly and John Moore of The Urban Institute, and is based on data obtained by the Office for Civil Rights of HEW, covering the six years 1968-1973*. I will also report some further results I have obtained since publication of that report. We first constructed a segregation index, and then examined the change in number of white students in the system in that same

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*J.S. Coleman, Sara Kelly, and John Moore, Trends in School Segregation 1968-73, Washington: Urban Institute, 1975.

year as a function of change in that segregation index, as well as of other variables. We carried out the examination for all systems, and for two subsets of systems: the twenty one largest central city systems in the country, and the forty-six next largest central city systems. The largest districts ranged from New York, over a million, to San Fransisco, about 80,000. The next ranged from Charlotte-Mecklenberg (which, though classified by USOE as a central-city district, is county-wide) to Colorado Springs, about 35,000. The results are these:

1. Apart from these large and middle-sized central-city systems, desegregation (as measured by reduction in the index of segregation) did not bring about loss of whites from the school system to the extent that we could measure it. Any effects of desegregation on white loss in suburbs, rural districts and independent towns over the country as a whole were sufficiently small that we could not detect it. Other researchers (Clotfelter and Munford) have found extensive white loss in predominantly black desegregating Mississippi counties, but these were washed out when examining the country as a whole.

2. In the large cities, and to a lesser extent in the medium-sized cities, desegregation did produce a loss of whites in the year of desegregation.

3. This loss is intensified in both sets of cities, when the proportion of blacks in the district is high.

4. The loss is also intensified in both sets of cities when the city district is surrounded by predominantly white suburban districts in the same metropolitan area.

5. There were extensive differences among cities, with Southern cities showing on the average somewhat more losses than Northern ones, but with substantial losses in Northern cities as well.

The magnitude of these effects can be indicated by our estimates of the average white loss when there is a reduction of .2 in the segregation index, which represents partial desegregation, but considerably less than complete racial balance. For this degree of desegregation, the prediction equations show that when the percentage black in the district is 25% and there are no surrounding white suburbs, there is only a 2% predicted loss in the large cities and a 3% predicted loss in the smaller ones. But when the percentage black is 50% and there are fairly extensive white suburbs, the predicted loss in the large cities is 23%, and in the smaller ones is 17% when desegregation occurs.*

Thus these results, which were confirmed by several other types of analysis, show that desegregation does bring about an extensive loss of whites, but this loss differs radically under different conditions.

The next question that arose was whether desegregation effects on white loss continue beyond the first year of desegregation. Our preliminary analysis was inconclusive because most large-city desegregation was quite recent, so we obtained data for 1974 and 1975 for the nine cities, among the largest 21, which underwent in a single year desegregation to the extent of reducing the index of segregation by .1. This represents partial, but far from complete desegregation. This allowed an examination of white losses in these cities the two years preceding desegregation, in the year of desegregation, and in the four following years, though the period did not extend that far for all cities. The results were these:**

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*Ibid, p. 65.

** These results are reported in James Coleman's Reply to Pettigrew and Green, Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 46, 1976, p. 217 - 225.

Two years before	4.1%	white loss
One year before	4.8%	" "
Desegregation year	17.4%	" "
One year after	7.0%	" "
Two years after	6.7%	" "
Three years after	10.1	" "
Four years after	8.1	" "

These results indicate that for these cities taken together, which varied in degree of desegregation, in proportion black, and in the extent of white suburbs surrounding them, the desegregation loss did diminish after the desegregation year. But it did not vanish. It still remained nearly twice as large as the pre-desegregation year. I could enumerate the losses in individual cities, but will mention only two, where the initial loss in the year of desegregation was small, which would lead one to think there would be no continuing effect. In Dallas, there was partial desegregation in 1971. In the two years preceding, white losses were under 2% per year. In 1971, the loss was 9.1%; and for the next four years, the average loss remained almost steady at an average of 8.4% per year. In Denver, there was partial desegregation in 1969, and more in 1970, as a result of one of the landmark court cases. Before 1969, there had been, for the four years prior to desegregation, as in Dallas less than a 2% loss per year. In 1969, the loss was less than 1%; but, as Reynolds Farley pointed out to me, this apparent non-loss may be misleading, because (as their superintendent's office confirmed) Denver annexed additional land during this period. For

the next five years, from 1970 - 1975, Denver has lost an average of 8.2% per year, which turns out to be a loss six times as great as in the pre-desegregation years.

These results, showing that the effect of desegregation in large cities continues well beyond the first year, have much stronger implications for population instability in large cities than would be true if the effect were confined to a single year. The conversion of a city from a racially mixed one to one that is predominantly black can occur in the span of a few years. In Boston, in a two-year period of desegregation, the school system has shifted from one that was 57.2% non-Spanish whites to 46.7% non-Spanish whites, with 16% of whites lost in the first year, and 19% in the second.

The next question that arises is what kind of desegregation in large cities produces the greatest loss of whites. To partially answer this, I obtained data which allowed comparing the assigned black - white enrollment to the actual enrollment in individual schools in two cities, Baltimore, for junior high and high schools at the time of partial desegregation in 1974, and Louisville, for elementary and secondary schools at the time of full-scale desegregation in 1975. The results are clear:

In Baltimore, there was no white loss between assigned and enrolled for schools that had been predominantly white, to which blacks were assigned, up to 30% black. Moving from these to schools which had been predominantly black and were in black areas of the city, the proportion of whites enrolling dropped sharply and linearly, so that the loss of whites was 50% in the junior high schools projected to be .8 black and 60% loss of whites in the

senior high schools projected to be 18 black.*

In Louisville, a near racial balance was created by bussing, to bring all schools to about 15 to 30% black. But 16 elementary schools, eight junior highs, and three high schools had been predominantly black before bussing, and were in all-black neighborhoods. There was a small white loss from the previously predominantly white schools, but 36% of whites assigned to these 16 previously black elementary schools in black neighborhoods never enrolled, and left the system. From the junior high schools, 30% never enrolled, and from the senior highs, 32%**. These were losses from schools that were projected to be less than 30% black since the court order imposed approximate racial balance, but these schools had been all black before the court order, and were in all-black neighborhoods.

These results from Baltimore and Louisville show that losses were very small from previously predominantly-white schools which were integrated by assignment of black children to them, but were very large from previously all-black schools in black neighborhoods which were integrated by assignment of white children to them. The results correspond to those of other

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*The analysis on which these results are based consists of regression equations in which the dependent variable was the number of whites enrolled divided by the number of whites assigned, and the independent variable was projected proportion black. For junior high schools, the range of the projected proportion black was .26 to .98, and the range of the dependent variable was .43 to 1.03. The regression equation was $y = 1.18 - .67x$, with $r^2 = .67$. The number of schools was 18, excluding seven all-black schools. For high schools, the range of projected proportion black was .30 to .84, and the range of the dependent variable was .37 to 1.04. The regression equation was $y = 1.24 - .82x$, with $r^2 = .47$. The number of schools was 10, excluding five all-black high schools. Similar equations were examined with black instead of white enrollment as the dependent variable. In both junior and senior high schools the regression coefficient was near zero (.10 and .02), with $r^2 = .02$ and .00.

** In both Baltimore and Louisville, almost no transfers were issued, since all transfers had to be justified to HEW by Baltimore or the district judge by Louisville. Thus transfers cannot account for these losses.

researchers, and to the experience of school administrators in cities like Dallas, which have attempted to initiate two-way bussing only to find that the bussing in one direction dries up, as the whites leave the system.*

These results indicate to me that compulsory two-way bussing, or compulsory assignment of white children to schools in neighborhoods that are homogeneously black, has not worked in cities. It simply has not produced racially stable schools. Even when judges order racial balance, as in Louisville, racial balance does not result. The previously black schools in black neighborhoods remain predominantly black. Compulsory one-way bussing, although it appears not to cause extensive loss of blacks or whites, is manifestly unfair to blacks. Consequently, I see the only form of desegregation that will assure equal rights and not exacerbate population instability in large cities as one in which bussing is voluntary. Furthermore, the earlier results I reported, which showed the importance of the protected suburbs in intensifying the loss of whites, indicates that population stability cannot occur so long as black children's rights to attend a school end at the city line, while their race or their income prevents them from moving to the suburbs. Thus any policy of voluntary bussing should, to bring population stability as well as equal rights, encompass the metropolitan area as a whole, removing the suburbs from their protected status. A bill was introduced in this Congress, by Congressmen Richardson Preyer and Morris Udall, to help bring this about. Such a policy would, it seems to me, achieve both the equal rights to which the courts have been attentive, and stable integration, rather than the unstable integration to which recent court decisions have often led.

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*See Charles Clotfelter " School Desegregation, 'Tipping', and Private School Enrollment," Journal of Human Resources, VII, 1976, pp. 29-50, and Luther Munford, "Desegregation and Private Schools," Social Policy, VI, No. 4, 1976, pp. 42-45.